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# WHY ENGLISH DOES NOT SIMPLIFY HER SPELLING.

BY MAX EASTMAN.

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SOME people like to reform everything they can get their hands on. Others want to fold away and worship whatever is presented to them by the caprice of history. The world is pretty evenly divided between these two. If only Creation had thought to make all the radicals red and all the conservatives white, it would have been a great convenience. For there is no use in trying to estimate a man's opinions until you discover to which of these fundamental schools he belongs. If he belongs to the reds, you take everything that he says with a grain of salt, and make up for not following his advice by enjoying his company. If he belongs to the whites, you take what he says (with all due respect for his gray hair and family connections) with a grain of pepper. Perhaps the drift of these remarks will reveal the fact that I am a red. I like to meddle and tinker. I would rather go from bad to worse than let well enough alone. I belong to that disreputable class damned by Tacitus (or Cæsar, or somebody who understood both Latin and human nature) as "desiring a revolution for its own sake." To such persons everything very obviously needs reforming, and the only question with them is, whether or not they have time to give the revolution their personal supervision. Instead of introducing myself, therefore, as the other debaters upon simplified spelling do, by wagging a long tail of university degrees, I will give the more relevant information that I am a red, and that what I say about anything organized or established is generally taken at a considerable discount.

For this reason I instinctively defend the Simplified Spelling Board. Its critics ought to remember that its motives are com-

plex, like the motives of human beings. It is not reforming the language with a special view to spelling-books, or printing-presses, or international diplomacy, or phonetics, or logic, or historic truthfulness; it is moved by all these considerations at once. To reform a thing means to make it better than it was; and in order to make a language better, it is necessary that all human interests be considered. That is what the Spelling Board is trying to do. Somehow it has got stuck in the popular mind that the chief purpose of this reform is to make it easy for the Germans to learn our language, so that we will not have to learn theirs. That is one very important consideration; but there are others just as important—"historical propriety, scientific regularity and practical economy," says the last bulletin. These three. And the greatest of these is practical economy. Which divides itself into economy in printing and writing and typewriting (five per cent. of our letters being considered superfluous), economy of eye-strain, economy of paper, economy of time spent by teachers and pupils (generously calculated at about a year for every pupil). We can save a good deal of money out of what we are spending for education and put it into battleships. Practical economy is the chief motive. But the others are there—"historical propriety," which some think is the only valid reason for anything, and "scientific regularity," which will make it possible for a child to reason out his own spellings. He will not so soon get the idea that education consists of being told. That is, to my revolutionary mind, the most important argument in favor of rationalizing our spelling. But no one of these arguments does all the work. The members of the Committee use them all. They try to strike a liberal attitude which will yield the highest values in each direction. When "practical economy" gets tired, they fall back on "historical propriety." When that wears out, they hitch up "scientific regularity." So you can generally suspect, when you see one of these arguments laid off, that the others are working.

It was a great joke, I thought, that the Board should fancy they were simplifying things when they took a few verbs that ended in *ed* in the past tense, and changed them to *t*. When you once learn that English verbs form their past in *ed*, it is no simplification to have to remember that some of them cut it down to *t*. Ending in *ed* in the past was about the only consistent and respectable thing that English verbs ever did. Now

that is gone, and we have a new exception on our hands. It used to be very smart to laugh at this "simplification"—but that was before you read the bulletins. After you read them, you found out that "scientific regularity" was not on the job there at all. It was "practical economy"—eye-strain, ink, paper, typewriters' fingers, proofreaders' nervous system—with "historical propriety" bossing the reform.

Of course, it is a little amusing to the man who is not doing the work to see a reformer get into trouble. After they get all those 900 long-tailed preterites in *ed* docked, then they have to go to work and lay out a new museum of exceptions.

"Verbs that end in *-ce* (*-ace*, *-ice*, *-ance*, *-ence*, etc.) in the infinitive cannot have the *d* in the preterit ending *-ced* simplified to *t*, because the resultant sequence *-ct* would be abnormal for the sound intended.

"The *-ed* cannot be spelled *-t* when the infinitive contains a long vowel written *a—e* (*bake*), *e..e* (*eke*), etc., etc."

These exceptions make you sick with the old blackboard sickness. This is where the language kicks back. It won't rationalize. Nothing will. It is the same way with the universe. Every once in a while a philosopher sets out to reform the universe, and, for every new rule he puts up, the universe comes back at him with another batch of exceptions. The raw material can always raise you one higher, if I may advance the figure, and that gives zest to the intellectual game. So it is with these grammatical exceptions. You could not eliminate them entirely, even if you had the remodelling of the human gullet. The object is, however, to reform the universe just all it can stand, but never forget that it was there first and you have to keep your eyes open.

There is one direction in which the Simplified Spelling Board has not kept its eyes open. One vital human interest, if my feelings do not mislead me, their bulletins of apology and exegesis never mention. I am not excited about it because I believe it will take its revenge. It will reform the reformation. But I take pleasure in pointing it out, because this is the first time I ever discovered in my own mind, anything like a conservative bias.

In an age which reduces all things to the so-called "practical test," we are prone to forget that a thing is practical only because it leads to an increase of some pleasure which is not prac-

tical, but enjoyed for its own sake. If we are going to make our language practical, we change it in such a way as to make it more useful to us in getting those things which we want, not because they are useful, but just because we want them. There is no use saving money on schools unless we can use it for something that we like better. Now, one of the things that we like, not because it is useful, but just because we like it, is beauty. A great many of the truest and best Americans are vitally interested in beauty as manifested in literary art. To them words have a value, not for what they can do only, but for what they are. As one of the chief values in literary art is variety (in the sound, appearance and associations of words), and as the work of the Spelling Board is an assault on the unparalleled varieties of the English language, it is right for artists to demand that the Board have an eye to this interest. Looking through their publications, however, I find not the scantiest allusion to the subject.

In the circular of May 20th, 1907, after congratulating themselves upon the support of scientists, they proceed as follows:

"On the other hand, the most vociferous of our opponents have been men of letters. It is pleasant to record that many of the foremost figures of contemporary American literature can be counted as ardent advocates of our cause. But it is indisputable also that some writers of prominence have revealed themselves as tied fast in the bonds of prejudice and as glorying in their enslavement. Perhaps, however, this is to be wondered at less than it is to be deplored, since it is the duty of the lyrists and of the romancers to use the language as best they can, and they are under no obligation to acquaint themselves with its history or with the principles which govern its growth."

The writer of that paragraph is stupid. Men of letters are just as prejudiced as, and perhaps a little more ignorant, than, anybody else; but they are human beings too, and as such the prime fact about them is that they are interested in their own interests. They are under no obligation to acquaint themselves, he says, with the history of the language or the principles that govern its growth. Indeed, they are not; and neither is any scientist, or typewriter, or proofreader, or schoolma'am, or steel manufacturer, or politician—nobody, in fact, but a few blue-spectacled lexicographers and close-eyed root-ferrets who make their living that way. They can't reform the language. The language will be reformed, if it is, by a great army of persons whose differing interests are all subserved by the change, and the "historical pro-

priety" people are an exceedingly insignificant squad in that army. Men of letters—especially the more subtle—do not belong to that army, because they are (like men of everything else) "tied fast in the bonds of prejudice" in favor of the things that they like best.

Men of letters are not, as a rule, primarily interested in any one of those reliable old shifts—scientific regularity, historical propriety, or practical economy. They are working a different shaft. They make their living, if they can, out of psychological variety, and that is what they are hunting for. To condemn them because they are not primarily interested in extricating German immigrants from the spelling-book, or smoothing down typewriters, or saving school money in order to emphasize the gestures of our navy, is as irrational as to condemn a natural-born red for wanting to revolutionize the language. They can't any of them help it.

Now, to be fair to the quotation, I will explain what the writer meant by saying literary objectors are tied fast in the bonds of prejudice and glorying in their enslavement. He meant that they are unwilling to give up the word values and word associations which they like, simply from habit, for others which are just as good, but which are unfamiliar to them. For instance, if you are a literary man, the word *debt* (spelled with a *b*) will have a special value for you and a great many rich associations. You have got used to the *b*, and the word will not fit comfortably into a page without it. It will not have just the same feeling-tone. But the Spelling Board believes it is your duty, in the interests of other trades, to drop the *b* and get used to the new form, which is just as good in itself, and which will soon begin to carry all the associations that the old one carried. In that particular case, the Spelling Board may be right. A great deal of the opposition to any reform arises from the selfishness of people who refuse to change their old habits for new ones that are just as good for them, and better for somebody else. On the other hand, it is very difficult to decide, in a given case, whether you are objecting to a new form just because it does not bear the old associations yet, or because it is by its intrinsic nature not fit to bear them. It is difficult to say whether *passiv* (with that abrupt and gymnastic ending) is unfit for the poetic representation of inactivity, or whether it merely seems unfit because

we are accustomed to slide off on an *-ive*. It is difficult to distinguish the judgments of custom from the judgments of reason, but this is a very general infirmity, and it is not, like ignorance, peculiar to men of letters.

A man of letters, essaying to write gruesome poetry, who should leave the *h* out of *ghost* and *aghost* and *ghastly* and *ghostly*, and the *w* out of *wraith*, and change the *re* of *spectre* to an *er* would be a fool. He would deservedly die of starvation. A ghost without an *h* is little better, for the purposes of poetry, than a goat. The *h* not only is connected by custom with the breathless and visionary moment, but for obvious reasons it *ought* to be. The word *ghost* is not at present associated with *post* and *most* and *roast* and *toast*, and a host of daylight experiences, and it is essential to the literary art that it should not become so. It is, with one or two others, a word by itself—a strange word, essentially unpronounced, unmuscularized, supernatural.

A member of the Simplifying Board brings forward, with the gusto of a bull routing the antiques out of a china-shop, a long parade of words that contain a needless *h*, thrust in by Caxton "after a Dutch fashion"—*ghuest*, *ghittar*, *ghospel*, *ghossip*, etc.—triumphantly pointing to the fact that we have got rid of this "awkward squad," and apparently wondering why *ghost* and its companions remain. Perhaps, if the writer had a little more sympathy with the growers of language, with some less knowledge about its growth, he would be just as wise. "In Italian," he says, "'hard' *g* before *e* or *i* is written *gh*, in French *gu*; but these devices are not needed in English." If they are not "needed," it is the more creditable to the artists, the true developers of the written language, that they were retained. It is the more creditable to them that they could tell the essential difference between a gossip and a ghost. "After a Dutch fashion," says he, with fine scorn. Whereas it is the pride and glory of the old Anglo-Saxon drift that it knew just where and when to borrow a jewel and slough off a scab. Every Continental nation has been robbed of its most intimate peculiarities. Asia and the treasures of Ind have been levied upon. There is that word *wraith*, a jewel to me since childhood, a word on whose historical propriety and scientific regularity and practical economy I dwell in a most serene and blissful indifference, but a word borrowed, I know, by the happy genius of the English people from

some travelling caravan of foreigners or fates. The man that desecrates such a syllable, a unity and a symbol of evanescence, like the half-uttered breath of a spirit, is the mortal enemy of all artists. Be he red or white, their ways part before the altar of beauty.

Not only is that word a jewel because of its suggested sound and its appearance, both essentially depending upon the *w*, but it is precious for two other reasons. One of these is its uniqueness. There is nothing else in the world like it, and there shall never be. The other reason is that its verbal and literal associates are totally different from what they would be if the *w* were omitted. It would be one of a vulgar company—*rail*, *raid*, *rain*, etc.—without its unutterable beginning, whereas with that beginning it is as little like any of those words as the vision itself might be. It is potentially associated with *why* and *whither* and *where*, words of hesitation and wonder.

To many, who cannot feel a word, or who, feeling it, cannot believe that their feeling depends upon such trivial things, these will seem the refinements of decadence. The sound of a word, they will think, ought to be enough to satisfy a healthy poet. That the sound is by no means unique in importance, however, any one may demonstrate to himself by comparing the flavor of two such words as *rough* and *ruff*. Not only the appearance, either, determines the difference, but very largely the muscular sensations of the throat and mouth. I venture to say that, were our ears subtly aware of the finest overtones, we should find those words differently pronounced. Our muscular sense is aware of the finest overtones. *Rough* is a very different word from *ruff*, aside from its meaning, to the most practical man. To me, as it happens, *rough* is more sharply distinguished from *ruff* than it is from *bough*, the appearance being more effective in that case than the sound.

As it is by no means impossible, however, for a red to be a decadent, and as the name of so deep and wholesome an artist as Mark Twain is recklessly advanced upon the side of simplification, I appeal upon the question of the importance of these subtleties to the only literary man of our times who rivalled him in popularity—Robert Louis Stevenson. I can find nothing to quote which quite indicates his views on a spelling reform; but I need only point to that essay, "On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature," for assurance that he believed in the in-



dispensability of subtle differences, not only in the sounds of words, but in their shape, and alphabetic associations, and size, and velocity, and grace. I quote a few significant, although not strictly apposite, words. The whole essay is apposite enough in the subtle perceptions which it reveals.

"And you will find another and much stranger circumstance. Literature is written by and for two senses: a sort of internal ear, quick to perceive 'unheard melodies'; and the eye, which directs the pen and deciphers the printed page. Well, even as there are rhymes for the eye, so you will find that there are assonances and alliterations. . . . Here, then, we have a fresh pattern—a pattern, to speak grossly, of letters—which makes the fourth preoccupation of the prose-writer, and the fifth of the versifier. At times it is very delicate and hard to perceive, and then perhaps most excellent and winning."

For further evidence that the perception of these hues and flavors is not a hypertrophy of the literary organ, observe this casual remark of an artist in a more respectable field:

"And if we have lost so many things, which in some cases are lost forever, of what seemed to the makers of works of art in the past the very essence of their difference from other people, what other things do we not lose when, for example, in poetry the exact quality of a single vowel, its shading in the scale of sound, has so much expression, so much importance to us? Think of all the combinations of these simple elements in the style of a great poet. Each syllable has a personality of its own. . . ."

For final proof that even a person of "scientific regularity" is constrained to recognize the visual and kinetic values of words, I quote in haste this passage from the most recent work upon the "Psychology of Beauty":

"Manifold may be the implications and suggestions of even a single letter. Thus a charming anonymous essay on the word 'grey.' 'Gray is a quiet color for daylight things, but there is a touch of difference, of romance even, about things that are grey,' etc."

Without looking farther for proofs of sanity, I will endeavor to set forth, with what scientific regularity I can myself muster, the various effects of the proposed simplification upon the language as artistic material.

The first of these effects is the mutilation of many words which have a precious character by virtue of silent, or so-called "super-

\* John La Farge, "Considerations on Painting."

fluous" letters. (1) These may be precious because their present form is like their meaning:

<i>fragile</i>	<i>fragil</i>	<i>thumb</i>	<i>thum</i>
<i>numb</i>	<i>num</i>	<i>scimitar</i>	<i>simitar</i>
<i>scythe</i>	<i>sithe</i>	<i>harangue</i>	<i>harang</i>
<i>solemn</i>	<i>solem</i>	<i>kissed</i>	<i>kist</i>
<i>gazelle</i>	<i>gazel</i>		

(I choose a few of these published changes at random, and, while some of them may represent personal prejudice, a universal truth remains. For instance, the *c* in *scythe* and *scissors* and *scimitar* is to cut with.)

The English language is especially rich in such words—termed “onomatopoeic.” As words were many of them born of the perception of such analogies, so many of them have been retained or altered by the same instinct. This accounts for untold “superfluous” or “illogical” letters. *Buz* is very good logic, but very poor poetry compared with *buzz*. The *b* in *dumb* and *lamb*, so the propriety man tells us, is “original”; the *b* in *thumb* and *numb* was inserted. But the reason why all four *b*’s are there now, is one and the same reason—namely, that each is, in a most delicate way, congruous with the meaning of its word. It is difficult to estimate things that are so unseizable as these, their elusiveness being the essence of their value. Like happiness itself, and like the motes before your eyes, when you look straight at them they run away into a corner and are not. But such gypsy things are most precious. In these ways our spelling is superior to the spelling of French and of German, and far superior to the spelling of Italian and Spanish. The practical economy man calls it “vicious.” “It is unworthy of a practical people.” “No better example could be found of the inconsistency of human nature,” says he, “than the fact that the most businesslike of races has been so long content with the most unbusinesslike of orthographies.” There is nothing inconsistent about the practical economy man, however. He is practical from the front end of his pamphlet to the back. It is possible that he sees the Anglo-Saxon race under the shadow of his own nose. It is possible that, if he would look beyond his own age and province, he would find the Anglo-Saxon more notably artistic and intellectual than businesslike. There is a race or two here that competes with us successfully in business. There is none in

literature. And if he should find any further evidence of this unpractical bent, then the spelling could line up on the same side of the argument. The Anglo-Saxon race might thus prove almost as consistent as the economy man, for there is no written language more worthy of an artistic people.

(2) The destroyed words may be precious because their present form makes them unique, whereas the change reduces them to vulgarity.

<i>nitre</i>	<i>niter</i>	<i>build</i>	<i>bild</i>
<i>mould</i>	<i>mold</i>	<i>choir</i>	<i>quire</i>
<i>although</i>	<i>altho</i>	<i>guardian</i>	<i>gardian</i>
<i>sylvan</i>	<i>silvan</i>	<i>campaign</i>	<i>campain</i>
<i>rhyme</i>	<i>rime</i>	<i>league</i>	<i>leag</i>
<i>autumn</i>	<i>autum</i>		

Let *autumn* stand for a thousand tone-poems that the proposed reform would destroy. Literature will never relinquish *autumn*.

(3) Words may be precious, by virtue of "superfluous" or "illogical" letters, because these letters determine valued associations and prevent disastrous ones.

<i>limb</i>	<i>lim</i>	<i>sovereign</i>	<i>soveren</i>
<i>courtesy</i>	<i>curtesy</i>	<i>lamb</i>	<i>lam</i>
<i>tongue</i>	<i>tung</i>		

The words that find themselves, one way or another, in this list are innumerable. You can do what you like with *phthisis*, and *eggs*, and *cyclopædias*, and *hæmatins* (whatever they are), but when you try to make *courtesy* into an American there is a kind of folly in the effort. Courtesy belongs to the leisure of the court; it would die after two days in a curt atmosphere. No music would ever flow from a *tung*; it could proceed as well from the *lung*, which it never has in the history of metaphor. And when it comes to trying to make a lamb *lam*, all poetry and religion protest. A lamb *can't* lam. He is too blunt. You might as well try to make a cow scream as to make a lamb *lam*.

It will be noticed, further, that most of the words quoted belong to more than one of these three lists. Some belong to all three. And in this connection I cannot forbear to return to the word *choir*. It is another childhood favorite. "Where the stars choir forth eternal harmonies"—sings to me from an old translation of Bruno, a phrase of which *choir* is the vital spirit. *Choir* is a word, so far as I can remember, absolutely unique, a word

without any poor relations. *Quire*, on the other hand, besides a distinctly papery feeling of its own, has a whole rabble of disreputable low Latin verbs coming after it. The stars could never stoop to it. "Choir," says the historical propriety man, "is one of the worst spellings in the English language. It is a blundering mixture of the modern French spelling *chœur* with the real English spelling *quire*." Let us thank God, then, that we are blundering Anglo-Saxons! We do not see the English language through propriety spectacles, but with the ignorant prejudice of an outdoor eyesight. I could almost wish I were a man of letters, I am so glad that I am not the historical propriety man. *Choir* stays in my vocabulary.

But to proceed with scientific regularity, there is another effect which simplified spelling has upon the literary material: it improves certain words in the same three ways I have mentioned.

<i>riskt</i>	<i>risked</i>		<i>gipsy</i>	<i>gypsy</i>
<i>stamp</i>	<i>stamped</i>		<i>clipt</i>	<i>clipped</i>

I do not classify these examples and spread them out and make a show of them, partly because I have developed a prejudice against the Simplifiers since I recalled their last desecration, and partly because there are not enough examples. It is obvious that a movement toward uniformity will tend to destroy rather than enhance associations and individualities; and it is obvious to one who knows how much onomatopœia has influenced the development of our language that any logical and economic reprisals upon it would tend to destroy these cherished fabrics. In those words ending in *t* the gains and losses are about even. For instance, Whitman (who, in passing, will not be accused of super-refinement) gained a similar flavor by writing, "Hush'd be the camps to-day." The hush actually occurs at that moment. And so it is with *clipt* and *dipt*, etc. But *kist* is altogether wrong. It would only do for a parlor encounter with an aunt.

In poetry sometimes we linger and sometimes we jump, but in "practical economy" we are always on the jump. A spare and naked line has a unique beauty—a line like this one of Shelley's, without a superfluous ounce for the eye or ear:

"But list, I hear  
The small clear silver lute of the young spirit  
That sits on the morning star."

But a language that was committed throughout to that style would be poor indeed:

“Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!”

“Seson of mists and mello frutfulness!”

From a literary standpoint it is desirable, within limits, to have a choice between two or more forms, and especially has this been appreciated in the case of past tenses. Keats uses the *t* and the *'d* and the *ed*, and it is undoubtedly a gain to be set more free in this respect by the Simplifiers.

The final, and possibly most important, effect of the simplification would be the loss of variety itself. The eccentricity of a given word, such as *through* or *enough*, may seem to have little intrinsic merit, but it is of untold value to the literary artist that his material be diversified by these venerable prodigies. They help him to endow every phrase with a separate character. For every wild word or bundle of words that is trimmed down and fitted into a group, an invaluable resource is lost to the poet.

We boast that our language is not second to Greek in its power of conveying subtle impressions; a great part of this power rests in the infinite number of phrase combinations possible. The Simplifiers aim to kill this power. An irreducible conflict therefore subsists between the commercial interest and the art interest in our language, and that is why men of letters have been “the most vociferous opponents.” That they not only are “the most vociferous,” but that they will prove also the most effective, remains to be pointed out.

It has already been stated that æsthetic judgment was the sovereign power in developing and controlling our language. Nothing else could have steered us through the Norman period, the season of our wild oats, the ecclesiastical oppression, the barbaric influence of scholars and propriety men, of pedants and scientific regulars, of King Charles’s French peacocks, and of the modern utility people. It is the exquisite sensibility of the English race that has conveyed to us through all these hideous onslaughts “a veritable power of expression, such as perhaps never stood at the command of any other people.” I quote from Jacob Grimm, “In wealth, good sense and closeness of structure, no other of the languages at this day spoken deserve to be compared with it.” But if the controlling interest in the past has

been æsthetic, it is safe for the hopeful to assert that it will continue so in the future, and that, therefore, those who desire that English should become the language of the earth do not wisely begin by making an assault upon its wealth.\*

The recurrent instinct of man is to cling to that thing which is not good *for* something, but good in itself. And that is why I believe that the artistic interest will reform the reformers. A few of their expedients will be chosen, are half chosen already; others will remain long as alternative forms; the language will clear itself and limber itself somewhat in response to the mania of expediteness that besets its American cultivators. The age will leave a characteristic mark; but it will leave, roughly speaking, only what is an addition to the wealth and not to the practical economy of its inheritance. A type of the usual arguments against simplification is that one which asserts that the forms of words are historic records significant of the interests of different ages, and that therefore we should leave them as they are. But if anything could be a better historic record, or more significant of this age, than the marks of violence left by its attempt to make the language *practical* I have to be informed of it. Such marks will undoubtedly be left upon the language, but they will be subservient to that general æsthetic development which so envelops the Simplifiers that they remain totally incognizant of its existence. The language as an immediate value will be a little enriched by the characters of this epoch, as history herself is a little enriched in interest by the arrival and passage of a period of frenetic commercialism. But the vast area of reform suggested by the Spelling Board is a futile thing to contemplate, because it knows only propriety and regularity and economy, whereas the true treasurers of the language are and always have been the knowers of its immediate beauty.

This is so certain that, but for the satisfaction of showing hands on the victorious side, it were futile to argue about it. And yet for those who actually fear lest the utility craze will swamp all things and leave them lying in its wake, there is a moral issue involved. It is their duty, if they believe in real wealth, to stand up for it. With entire truth the Simplifiers

\* "English is remarkable for the intensity and variety of the color of its words. No language, I believe, has so many words specifically poetic."  
—George Santayana, in "*The Sense of Beauty*."

point out that their critics have advanced no reason or valid argument against them. This may be because the lovers of beauty are too sure of her power to enter the lists. It may be because they are but dimly conscious of the reasons for their choice, and are confused between the values that they perceive to arise from habit and those which they know to inhere in the nature of the words. But, whatever the cause of their silence, it is clear that their opposition to the movement is arbitrary and self-justified and unanswerable. It is a difference of will.

There is, however, an allied reason for their opposition which is based upon an interest common to all parties. It is the interest in democratic culture. You can deduce from the examples and quotations given, that our inheritance of poetry and excellent literature will either survive in the old spelling or suffer immense mutilation. Reverence for the classics is the prime conservative element in the growth of language. And I believe that the classics will resist an arbitrary and extensive change in their spelling; they will not be profitably published in the revised forms. If I am right, it is obvious that a great change in the vulgar usage would at once set these monuments aloft out of the market-place. Our best literature could no longer flow in the minds of the people. It would be a written language, the genius of which would have to be learned. Therefore, it would belong to the scholars and the leisure class, as Chaucer already does. That this alienation of literature from lively speech is a peril always imminent, history can teach you. The recasting of our commercial language, by a committee of persons who acknowledge nowhere a tittle of the claims of beauty, is an invitation of this peril. This is proven when it is confessed that the Committee is chiefly opposed by men of letters. Either we will mutilate our inheritance or it will recede from us; a lover of beauty and democracy cannot accede to either alternative. That dilemma, added to an estimation of the immediate values to be lost, leads me, in spite of an irreverent nature and a natural inclination toward the bomb-shell, to turn my back upon this ill-considered revolution.

MAX EASTMAN.